

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
March 31, 1987; Designation List 188  
LP-1298

NEW YORK CENTRAL BUILDING/nOW HELMSLEY BUILDING, main floor interior consisting of the 45th Street entrance lobby, 46th Street entrance lobby, main lobby and adjacent side lobbies, and elevator cabs (excluding those in elevator bank H) and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including, but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, chandeliers, information desk, mail boxes, metal grilles, clocks, doors, elevator doors, elevator indicators, signs, and sign supports; 230 Park Avenue, Manhattan; built 1927-29; architects: Warren & Wetmore.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1300, Lot 1.

On April 13, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the New York Central Building (now Helmsley Building), main floor interior consisting of the 45th Street entrance lobby, 46th Street entrance lobby, main lobby and adjacent side lobbies, and elevator cabs (excluding those in elevator bank H), and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including, but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, chandeliers, information desk, mail boxes, metal grilles, clocks, doors, elevator doors, elevator indicators, signs, and sign supports; 230 Park Avenue, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 23). The hearing was continued to June 8, 1982 (Item 5). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

### Summary

Prior to the construction of Grand Central Terminal and the electrification and submergence of its tracks (1903-1913), Park Avenue between 42nd and 52nd Streets blighted New York as an exposed railyard. Noisy, grimy and dangerous, its locomotives tirelessly belched their waste into the air as crosstown traffic was stranded on either side of the maze-like rails. By 1929, however, in a spectacular application of skyscraper technology both above and below ground, revenue producing structures were erected on steel stilts over the yard, transforming the area into a prestigious mixed-use, multi-level enclave, integrated in its architecture and transportation systems --- the finest realization of the City Beautiful Movement in New York. The New York Central Building provided the Terminal City complex with a dramatic lynchpin as well as a bridge to the rest of Manhattan. Through special negotiations with city officials it was constructed in 1927-29 astride Park Avenue, allowing for a continuation of the boulevard's sidewalk- and street traffic via pedestrian corridors and vehicular tunnels burrowed through the building's base. The New York Central's lobby provided a fifth, and by far the most splendid, of its north-south arteries. The five passages together transformed the base of this uniquely honeycombed building from a barrier into a bridge, an open

gate to Grand Central Terminal, the "Gateway to a Continent."

The correspondences between the two structures are conspicuous. Designed by the same architects in the same materials and Beaux-Arts style, the New York Central Building developed some of the depot's most innovative circulation systems, simultaneously enlarging upon its heroic character and imagery. The lobby of the New York Central Building, faced with rich marble and ornamented by a wealth of bronze, provided the railroad with a princely entrance to its new corporate headquarters. With consummate elegance and a monumentality independent of size, it ranks among the finest lobbies in New York.

### Early History

In 1863-67 Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt acquired control of the New York & Harlem, the Hudson River and the New York Central Railroads (consolidated in 1869 as the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad). Rerouting the trains along a single line (the Harlem) for five miles south from the Bronx, Vanderbilt determined to build a new terminal at 42nd Street. He acquired most of the property between 42nd and 48th Streets (subsequently extended to 52nd Street), Madison and Lexington Avenues, and commissioned John B. Snook to design the depot (1871), with an impressive glass and metal shed by R. G. Hatfield immediately behind.

The land north of the new facility was used as a train yard: an exposed, noisy, cinder- and smoke-belching sprawl which made neighboring real estate uninhabitable to all but squatters. The paddle-shaped track network interrupted crosstown streets, leaving them dead ends on either side of the yard. Subsequent improvements lowered the rails several feet below grade and opened crosstown traffic with periodic elevated bridges. But by the turn of the century increased suburban and commuter traffic proved these palliative measures inadequate: the polluting locomotives thwarted seminal attempts at urban renewal while the still only-partially submerged tracks created an intolerable obstacle to the street traffic which the terminal inevitably generated. Solutions to these and a panoply of related problems came in 1903 when William J. Wilgus, the visionary chief engineer of the New York Central, presented the railroad with a grand scheme — ultimately proved epochal — for the replacement of the existing Grand Central Terminal with a new, more technologically advanced facility. Key to the project was the electrification of rail lines. Unlike steam locomotives, which required open air or ventilated tunnels for release of their combusted waste, electrified trains could be submerged below ground. The acreage thus reclaimed at ground level and above could be used, Wilgus foresaw, for revenue-producing structures. High profit buildings were erected on skeletal steel supports over the tracks: "And thus from the air [was] taken wealth."<sup>1</sup> The alchemous plan repaid the enormous cost of the new terminal and the electrification many times over.

Realization of Wilgus' scheme involved a design competition to which four firms were invited. Per requirements, each submitted a proposal for a skyscraping terminal in the center of Park Avenue but so arranged as to connect both north and south segments of the boulevard.<sup>2</sup> The contest was

won by Reed & Stem who had worked with Wilgus on previous railroad commissions (and to whom Reed was related by marriage). Their proposal called for a neo-Renaissance terminal surmounted by a 22-story hotel or office tower. Preceded on the north by a grand "Court of Honor," the depot was, in a stroke of genius, to be girdled by an "exterior circumferential elevated driveway" along which Park Avenue would flow in divided north- and southbound streams. Architects Warren & Wetmore subsequently transformed the design into the current low, monumental mass, but many of its essential features survived. Indeed, Reed & Stem's tower proposal (together with that of unsuccessful competitors McKim, Mead & White) may be seen as the germ of the New York Central Building which Warren & Wetmore constructed to the north of the terminal some two decades later.

### Terminal City

In 1903 plans were submitted to the Board of Estimate for the new train station as well as for the revenue-producers that Wilgus had imagined. In addition to the head house, the proposal included mail and express terminals, a post office, and hotels. Several of the structures were undertaken concurrently with the new terminal, but not until the 1920s (after the post-World War I depression) did the precinct assume the distinctive character of the planned enclave known as "Terminal City." Building efforts initially focused on the construction of new hotels whose development, like most luxury buildings, had been stemmed by the war, and whose need near the depot was critical. Between the completion of the terminal in 1913 and the New York Central Building in 1927-29, more than a score of hotels and apartment buildings were added to the precinct, all of roughly the same height and classicizing style. These were followed, after 1922, by the erection of new office buildings which, although taller than the hotels, were nonetheless related in style, and frequently designed by the same architects.<sup>3</sup> In each case the new buildings marched north, perched on steel stilts over the railyard. They transformed Park Avenue into a grand and cohesive urban corridor with a ribbon of spinal plantings. In the process they earned for this boulevard the Park Avenue name which, although official since 1888, had previously been little deserved.<sup>4</sup> (See figs. 2 & 3, p. 4) The 34-story New York Central Building was the final addition to Terminal City. Taller, more dramatic and conspicuously sited than any other unit in the complex, it became the riveting lynchpin of "one of the most urbane groups of commercial buildings in the world."<sup>5</sup>

The creation of Terminal City was a direct outgrowth of the "City Beautiful Movement." Fostered by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, this movement sought to transform the haphazard development of American metropolises into clean, symmetrical urban centers, beautified by parks, public monuments and axial roadways, and guided in their future growth by a comprehensive plan for transportation and architectural integration. Like other cities (most notably Washington, D.C. with its MacMillan Plan of 1902-03), New York attempted implementation. In a little-known effort beginning in 1902 and culminating five years later, the New York Public

Fig.1 Rail yard of the New York Central Railroad in 1903; view to the south.

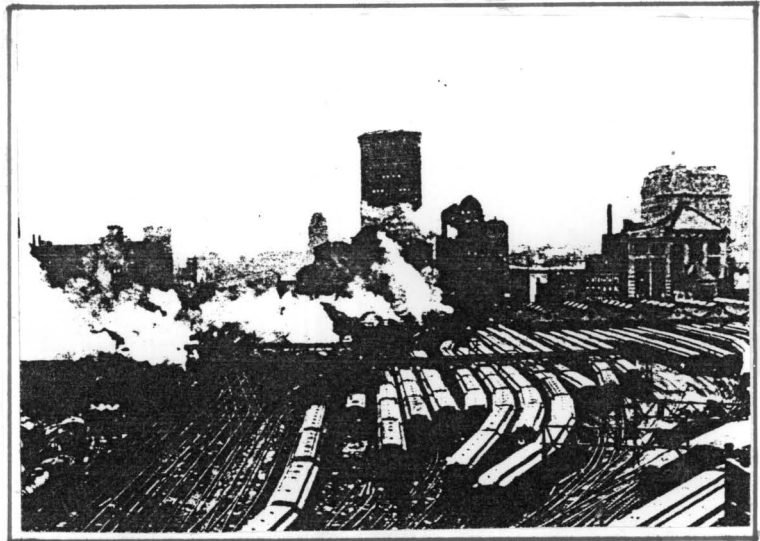
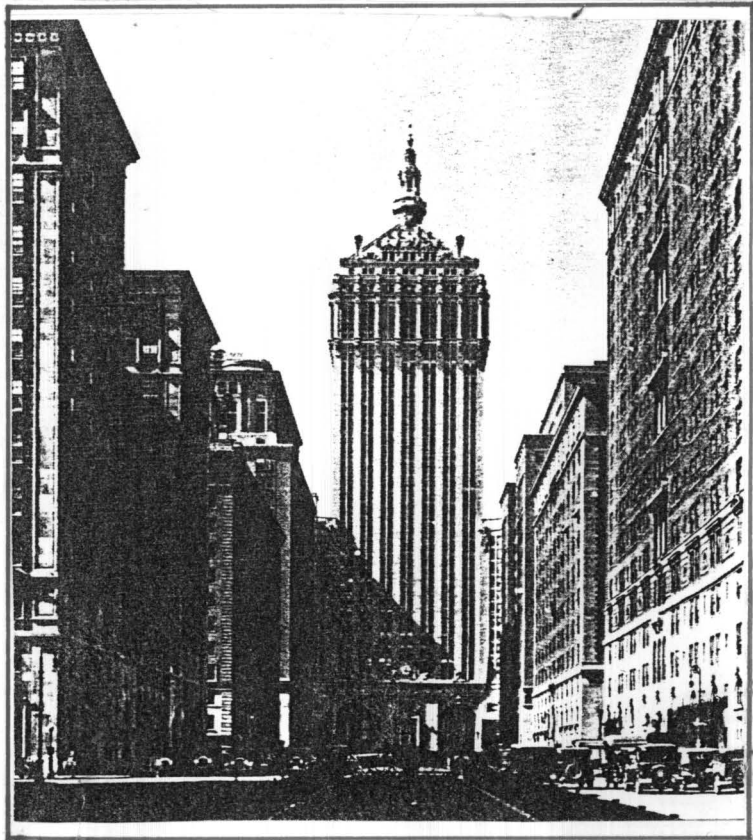


Fig.2 Same view as in Fig. 1, as transformed into Terminal City with the New York Central Building in axial position on Park Avenue (1929).



Improvement Commission submitted a comprehensive scheme for the city's development "so designed that all its parts shall be consistent, the one with the other, and form a homogeneous whole."<sup>6</sup> This was the first time since the establishment of Manhattan's street grid in 1811 that a general urban plan had been proposed for New York; it met with unmitigated failure. Calling for parkways, subsidiary streets, pedestrian arcades and imposing vistas (all aspects of Terminal City), the municipal scheme was undermined by an over-emphasis of aesthetic concerns. It suffered from an unrealistic exclusion of economic and social forces and, perhaps most damagingly, from the inability of democratic government to consolidate its widely-diffused powers for urban renewal on such an imperial scale.

The degree to which city bureaucracy was incapable of action contrasted starkly with the position of the railroad at the turn of the century: a multi-million dollar private enterprise whose capital, organization and vast real estate holdings permitted -- indeed, encouraged -- a coordinated development policy. Moreover, the railroad's massive physical needs, and its cultivated civic and philanthropic self-image found appropriate architectural models in the ancient, Renaissance and Beaux-Arts public buildings which so inspired the City Beautiful Movement. Wilgus, Reed & Stem, and Warren & Wetmore, among others, were nurtured on utopian urban visions. Their creation of the mixed-use, multi-level Terminal City, integrated in its architecture and transportation systems, is one of



the best, if not the greatest, legacy of the City Beautiful Movement in New York. The achievement was challenged -- arguably equalled -- only by Rockefeller Center which, built in the 1930s, followed the Terminal City prototype.<sup>7</sup>

### Architects of the New York Central Building

Charles Delevan Wetmore (1866-1941) received an A.B. degree from Harvard in 1889 and three years later, in 1892, graduated from its Law School. He had also studied architecture, and before joining the legal firm of Carter, Ledyard & Milburn, designed for his alma mater the Claverly, Westmorly and Apley Court dormitories. It was during a consultation about the design of his own house that Wetmore met his future partner, Whitney Warren (1864-1943), a graduate of Columbia College (1886), of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1887-94) and subsequently, a member of the New York office of McKim, Mead & White. Warren, impressed by his client's architectural ability, suggested that Wetmore leave the practice of law. The two men formed a partnership in 1898. Wetmore specialized in the firm's legal and financial affairs; Warren emerged as the principal designer.

Warren & Wetmore's first major commission came just one year later when they prevailed in a contest for the design of the New York Yacht Club (1899). An enormously auspicious beginning, this celebrated project was nonetheless succeeded only by lesser residential works and modest office buildings. Not until 1903 did the firm emerge on the forefront of New York architecture and then, under suspect terms: despite the victory of Reed & Stem in the competition for Grand Central Terminal, and indeed, without the knowledge of that premiated firm, Warren & Wetmore submitted another scheme for the depot to William K. Vanderbilt, then chairman of the board of the New York Central (and a cousin and close friend of Whitney Warren). The strength of nepotism was proven, as were Wetmore's skills as an attorney. In a (doubtlessly strained) compromise, Warren & Wetmore became associated with Reed & Stem on the terminal, but later assumed total control of design.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of a decade they combined their low-lying Beaux-Arts proposal with essential elements from Reed & Stem's more innovative scheme.

In the end, the eminently gifted, if opportunistic, Warren & Wetmore achieved the greater fame, and it was they who became the preferred architects of the New York Central. Engaged by the railroad almost continuously for a quarter-century, the firm was responsible for much of the development of Terminal City. Beginning with the Biltmore Hotel in 1911-13 (designed in association with Reed & Stem; demolished), Warren & Wetmore executed some of the most prestigious hotels in the zone, including the Belmont (1905; demolished), the Ritz-Carlton (1910; demolished), the Vanderbilt (1912), Commodore (1916), Linnard (1919; demolished), and the Ambassador (1921), as well as the post office adjacent to Grand Central, several service structures for the railroad, nearly a dozen Park Avenue apartment buildings, office buildings and numerous shops. Together with such notable (non-railroad sponsored) commissions as the Heckscher Building of 1920, the award-winning Aeolian Building of five years later, and the former Bonwit Teller department store of 1928 (all on Fifth Avenue), as

well as Steinway Hall on West 57th Street (1925), Warren & Wetmore executed at least 92 buildings and building additions in New York, with more than a score of additional commissions elsewhere in the continent.<sup>9</sup> The New York Central Building was their final undertaking for the railroad and the last major project executed by the firm in New York. Completed in 1929, it preceded Warren's retirement by only two years. The office closed a decade later upon Wetmore's death in 1941.

### The New York Central Building

Between the completion of Grand Central Terminal in 1913 and the 100th anniversary of the New York Central Railroad in 1926, the number of passengers annually served by the depot nearly doubled, rising prodigiously from 23 million to 43 million in just over a dozen years.<sup>10</sup> During the same short period, in a historically unparalleled feat, the most formidable engineering problems had been solved, and Terminal City had risen triumphantly above the tireless railyard. By 1926 the only open cuts in the precinct lay on either side of Park Avenue between 45th and 46th Streets. Work on the combined sites began later in the same centennial year and in March 1929 -- just seven months before the stock market crashed -- New York Central's executives relocated from their corporate offices in 466 Lexington Avenue into the top three floors of their new namesake building across the street. Towering above its neighbors, the 34-story structure literally provided "the crowning achievement" to the railroad's urban development plan.<sup>11</sup> So skilled were its design and execution, and so magnificent its siting, that the railroad's trade journal confidently predicted that the New York Central Building was "destined to become one of New York City's landmarks."<sup>12</sup>

**Circulation Systems** Hardly less spectacular -- and to the minds of city officials, much more important, was the role which the building played in relieving the insufferable traffic around Grand Central.<sup>13</sup> Railroad officials negotiated with city authorities for five years before reaching a solution. In the course of negotiations (1919-24) the railroad totally revised its plans. Instead of following through with its original intention to erect "one building on the west side of Park Avenue, the same size as the Postum Building [21 stories] and another on the east side of Park Avenue similar to the Park Lexington Building [also 21 stories]," the New York Central proposed to construct one large building astride the boulevard.<sup>14</sup> In exchange for the required variances, city officials requested, and received from the railroad, the extension of Vanderbilt Avenue two blocks north of its former terminus at 45th Street. The New York Central also agreed to improve the elevated drive which, proposed by Reed & Stem, had been constructed along the west side of Grand Central Terminal. The railroad further agreed to erect a companion drive along the east of the depot (a transformation of the private delivery platform atop Depew Place), thus realizing original plans to have public traffic flow around the depot in bifurcated one-way lanes (southbound on the west; northbound on the east).<sup>15</sup> Instead of descending to grade at 45th Street, the elevated drives were to span that street on bridges and, through specially granted easements, continue north on ramps through the base of the proposed New York Central Building. Cars emerging

from its vehicular tunnels at 46th Street would proceed uptown along Park Avenue's newly widened traffic lanes.<sup>16</sup> A corollary of the same agreement provided for "a permanent and perpetual easement of passage on foot," namely the continuation of Park Avenue's sidewalks through through two open (shop-lined) corridors on either side of the tunnels.

Hailed by Manhattan Borough President Julius Miller as "the biggest thing in traffic relief in twenty years,"<sup>17</sup> the ingenious solution rendered the base of the New York Central Building a bridge rather than a barrier. Swallowing Park Avenue's traffic both to and from the terminal, this uniquely honeycombed building became an open gate to the "Gateway to a Continent." Both its interior and exterior were designed according to the same (Beaux-Arts) principles of axial circulation.

Unlike most skyscrapers whose lobbies, however imposing, are self-contained cul-de-sacs, the lobby of the New York Central Building was designed as a through corridor between 45th and 46th Streets. Measuring only about 20 feet wide (excluding the elevator alcoves), this narrow but lofty aisle was sandwiched in between the building's vehicular tunnels — an arrangement which required special insulation against the vibrations of racing traffic.<sup>18</sup> The lobby supplemented the roadways and the two open pedestrian walks, providing a fifth, and by far the most splendid, of the New York Central Building's north-south arteries. It also introduced movement along a vertical axis with 32 high speed self-leveling elevators, grouped into fours and tucked neatly into alcoves on either side of the corridor.

**Design Influences** Inspired by the great public buildings of antiquity, Grand Central Terminal celebrated the railroad's prowess with monumental spaces and heroic imagery in which mythological gods became the deities of modern industry. With truly imperial grandeur the depot's triumphal arches dominate the streetscape, their limestone frames infilled by decorative bronze grilles. Specifications made clear that the New York Central Building would be executed as the terminal's lofty supplement, using the same materials with equal craftsmanship.<sup>19</sup> And despite the almost exclusive priority of the Art Deco style for contemporaneous skyscrapers, the building was designed, like the terminal, "along strictly classical lines."<sup>20</sup> But while the station functioned as a

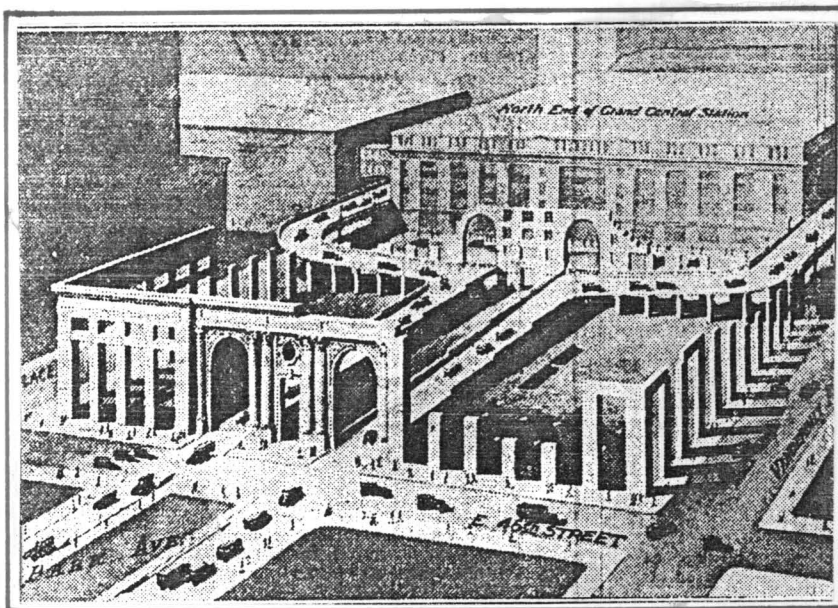


Fig.3 Section of the New York Central Building. The lobby is located in between the two roadways which, in turn, are flanked by the pedestrian walks (not illustrated). Park Avenue and 46th St. are in the foreground; Vanderbilt Avenue at right; the former Depew Place at left.

"people's palace", serving millions of passengers annually, the New York Central Building was the princely domain of the select. Built as the railroad's corporate headquarters and otherwise occupied by prestigious tenants, its lobby was "as gorgeous and magnificent as money and the latest designs of architects and skill of builders could make it."<sup>21</sup> (See photograph 1, p. 21).

The marble-lined hall is enriched by a wealth of bronze: patterned window frames, two large tenant directories, an enormous double-chute mailbox, and a "special type of enclosed radiator" which, encased in decorative bronze housings, added "considerably to the [building's] attractiveness and usefulness."<sup>22</sup> The lobby and its vestibules are illuminated by five large and ten smaller chandeliers. Their elaborate bronze detail is surpassed only by the marvelous tendril-like sign supports which project into the lobby from each arched alcove, reinforcing its impression of Medicean splendor. Just as Renaissance princes used personal attributes and family shields as ornamental features, the New York Central intertwined its initials in each of these spiky bronze flourishes (See photograph 2, p. 22). The initials reappear on the lobby's 64 elevator doors where, in a marriage of 16th- and 20th-century imagery, the Renaissance allusion reaches its brilliant climax. Each door has a gleaming Chinese red ground cut back to reveal bronze symbols of industrial progress amid groteschi and foliate arabesques. A bison head at the base of each door personalizes and nationalizes the design, referring to the western extension of the railroad and its critical role in the settlement of America's frontier. (The bison heads and a good deal of industrial imagery also appear on the facades of the New York Central Building, thereby integrating its ornamental program and establishing a strong interior-exterior relationship). The theme of imperial might and industrial progress is further glorified in the bronze elevator indicators above each set of elevator doors.

The impact of each barrel-vaulted alcove with its Jaspe oriental marble wainscoting, red and bronze doors and trim is, in a word, dazzling. The warm orieny is continued with a delightful touch of romance in the elevator cabs themselves: aglow with matching red walls and glittering with delicate gilded wood moldings, each cab is crowned by a gilt ribbed dome. Between the ribs are impressionistic cloudscapes which seem to transform the cabs into idyllic floating pergolas. (See photograph 4, p. 24). Taken as a whole, the lobby is "surely one of the city's finest."<sup>23</sup>

**Construction History** Contrary to the normal (and usually ineffective) course of development whereby the railroad erected its buildings and the city, in an independent effort, the surrounding streets,<sup>24</sup> the New York Central assumed physical responsibility for every aspect of construction. The arrangement proved particularly judicious because the entire campaign took place over double-level live trackage. In turn, city officials made every effort to aid and expedite the undertaking. So successfully did the two parties interact that the enterprise was publicly hailed as a model of private and municipal cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

Foundation preparations began in December 1926. Final plans for the structure were submitted on February 11, 1927, and three months later, on



May 19th, 350 men from the James Stewart Construction Company anchored the last of the New York Central Building's steel piers 50 feet into the ground.<sup>26</sup> The task of providing adequate support for the superstructure had been particularly demanding: the entire campaign took place amid double level tracks which serviced more than 700 trains daily (a locomotive passed through operations approximately every 1-1/2 minutes of each working

day). The problem was further compounded because the rails (now electrified) prevented any possibility of continuous foundation walls and even more perplexing, because the frequent non-alignment of upper and lower tracks prohibited the use of through-columns. A solution was achieved through a cleverly staggered skeletal steel frame in which upper level supports were carried on girders spanning the lower tracks. The lower piers, in turn, were irregularly spaced and anchored into the ground as the maze of rails would allow. The building was insulated against vibrations from the rumbling trains with lead and asbestos mats, and further protected by the 4-inch compressed cork tubes which encased those piers adjacent to rails.<sup>27</sup> More than 9,000 tons of steel were used in the foundations and ground floor alone. The entire structure required some 26,000 tons, a good deal of which went into construction of the vehicular roadways.

Work continued at a rapid pace and on April 5, 1928 -- just hours after the death of Chauncey Depew, chairman of New York Central's board of directors -- the last rivet was driven into the 34-story steel frame.<sup>28</sup> A temporary certificate of occupancy (# 11979) was issued in late December, and on September 25, 1929, building operations were brought to a close. Three years later the New York Central Building was acclaimed "the most remarkable office building in the world...even the wonderful Hudson Bridge [George Washington, 1931] required no greater engineering skill to construct."<sup>29</sup>

However brilliant, the New York Central Building's engineering did not fully account for its singular popularity. Even before completion, and continuing unstemmed until the present day, this "absolutely glorious"<sup>30</sup> structure captivated New York like few others. Much of its celebrity is due to the unusual distinction of having a double focus. Unlike most other buildings in grid-patterned New York which are obscured at ground level and thus rely on distinctive crowns for recognition, the New York Central is conspicuously visible from great distances both at street level and on the skyline. Just as its exterior provided a commanding symbol of the railroad's prowess, its lobby, lavishly ornamented with Renaissance and industrial imagery, provided a royal setting for the railroad's barons. With exquisite refinement and a masterful sculpturing of space, Warren & Wetmore created a lobby in which architecture and ornament are inseparable, skillfully alternating grand and more human scales, and rendering this through-corridor one of the most splendid Beaux-Arts lobbies in New York.

**Recent History** After radiant years as the railroad's corporate headquarters, the New York Central Building suffered a dark future with the failing finances, and finally the bankruptcy, of the New York Central Railroad. The structure was sold in the late 1950s, and subsequently rechristened the "New York General Building" -- an economic change of name

which required only two letters to be recut on the cornice!<sup>31</sup>

Real estate magnate Harry Helmsley purchased the building in 1977 and conferred on it his name. In the following year, an extensive renovation program was undertaken, restoring and refurbishing the building from top to bottom, both interior and out.<sup>32</sup> To the great credit of the new owner, the lobby of the New York Central Building, now the Helmsley Building, was restored to its original splendor.

Report prepared by  
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#### Notes

1. Wilgus, quoted by John Tauranac, Elegant New York: the Builders and their Buildings, 1885-1915, New York, 1985, p. 93. See also William J. Wilgus, "The Grand Central Terminal in Perspective," (1941), p. 922ff Carl Condit, The Port of New York: A History of the Rail and Terminal System from the Grand Central Electrification to the Present, Chicago, 1980, vol. 2, passim and the Designation Report for the exterior and particularly the interior of Grand Central Terminal, Landmarks Preservation Commission, respectively LP-0266 (August 7, 1967) and LP-1099 (September 23, 1980).
2. According to Wilgus (p. 1047), the first plan for a skyscraping terminal was prepared by Samuel Huckel Jr. in order to illustrate Wilgus' proposed air rights development to railroad officials. Wilgus submitted the scheme on December 22, 1902. For a discussion of the competition and illustrations of the various proposals, see Deborah Nevins, ed., Grand Central Terminal: City within the City, 1982, p. 10ff.
3. Among the hotels on Park Avenue were Warren & Wetmore's Margueray (1918, at 47-48th St), Linnard (1919 at 50th St.) and Ambassador (1921, at 51st St.), all demolished; Schultze & Weaver's Park Lane Hotel (1924, at 48th; demol.) and Waldorf Astoria (1931, at 49th); and The Drake (Bing & Bing, 1927, at 56th St.). On Lexington Avenue: the Commodore (Warren & Wetmore, 1919, at 42nd St.); the Lexington (Schultze & Weaver, at 48th); the Shelton (A.L. Harmon, 1924, at 49th St.); the Barclay (Cross & Cross, 1927, at 48th St.); the Beverly (1927, at 50th St.) and Montclair (1928, at 49th St.), both by Emery Roth. On Vanderbilt Avenue: Warren & Wetmore's Biltmore (1914, at 43rd St.) and Ritz Carlton (1910, at 46th St.), both demolished; and The Roosevelt (George B. Post & Sons, 1924, at 45th St.).  
Office buildings included the Postum Building (Cross & Cross, 1925, at 45th & Park); Warren & Wetmore's Park Lexington Building (1923, at 46th & Park), the 466 Lexington Avenue Building and post office (1906, at 43rd & Lexington); and Sloan & Robertson's Graybar Building (1927, 42nd & Lexington).

4. Inexplicable when bestowed, the name "Park Avenue" was conferred on Fourth Avenue in stages. By 1867 it applied as far north as 42nd St; extended in 1888 to 96th St; up to Fordham Road in 1896. (Henry Moscow, The Street Book: an Encyclopedia of Manhattan's Street Names and their Origins, New York, 1978, p. 81. See also, F.A. Collins, The Romance of Park Avenue, New York, 1930).
5. Condit, The Port of New York, 2, p. 244.
6. "Report of the New York City Public Improvement Commission to the Honorable George B. McClellan...and to the Honorable Board of Alderman," New York, 1905. The major points of this report were elaborated in the Commission's final report of 1907. See Harvey B. Kantor, "The City Beautiful in New York," New York Historical Society Quarterly, 67 (April, 1967), p. 148-71. See also Nevins, Grand Central Terminal, p. 14ff.
7. See Rockefeller Center designation report, Landmarks Preservation Commission, April 23, 1985 (LP-1446). See also James Marston Fitch, Grand Central Terminal and Rockefeller Center: A Historical-Critical Estimate of their Significance, Albany, 1974.
8. On November 16, 1911 (one day after Reed's funeral), Wetmore suggested to railroad officials that he and Warren be given full responsibility for the terminal. Such action was taken in the following month, never having consulted Stem. Stem sued Warren & Wetmore and won his case on July 17, 1916. See Nevins, Grand Central Terminal, p. 15.
9. Biographical data taken from "Architects' File," Landmarks Preservation Commission. See also for a list of Warren & Wetmore's commissions.
10. "Grand Central Traffic Jumps," New York Central Lines Magazine, 8 n10 (January 1928) p. 36.
11. New York Central Building, (promotional brochure), [1928?], p. 3.
12. "Bison Heads Adorn the New Building in New York," New York Central Lines, 9 (May 1928) p. 38.
13. For details see New York Central Building Exterior designation report, LP-1297 (February 10, 1987).
14. "34-Story New York Central Office Building Part of Traffic Improvements," New York Central Lines, 8 (October, 1927), p. 10.
15. The City of New York and New York and Harlem Railroad Company and its Lessee the New York Central Railroad Company, "Changes and Additions to Overhead Roadways around the Grand Central Terminal: Form of Agreement and Resolution," New York, 1924, p. 13. Hereafter cited as "Form of Agreement." Work on the east drive began in spring, 1927 and was completed in January of 1928. Improvement of the west drive followed soon after. See "New Traffic Roadway Around Grand Central Terminal Formally Opened," New York Central Lines, 8 (March, 1928), p. 10-11.
16. The mall along the spine of Park Avenue was narrowed from 46th to 57th Streets, adding 36 feet to the roadway.

17. "New York Central Starts 35-Story Building," New York Times, December 9, 1926, p. 13.
18. C.W.Y. Currie, "Unusual Structural Features in New York Central Skyscraper," American Architect, 134 (July 5, 1928), p. 59-62. See also New York Times, September 18, 1927.
19. "Form of Agreement."
20. "34-Story New York Central Office Building Part of Traffic Improvements," p. 102.
21. W. Parker Chase, New York, the Wonder City, New York, 1932, p. 246.
22. New York Central Building, p. 12.
23. Paul Goldberger, "Design Notebook," New York Times, November 30, 1978, sec. C, p. 10.
24. See, for example, Jacob L. Crane, Jr., "Street Development in Relation to Railroad Terminals," American Society of Civil Engineers. Transactions, 87 (1924), p. 795-801.
25. "Topics of the Times: A Great Public Improvement," New York Times, September 19, 1927, p. 24.
26. NB67-37. See also "Central Files Plans for 35-Story Offices," New York Times, February 12, 1927, p. 27 and "Foundations Begun," New York Times, December 9, 1926, p. 13.
27. Currie, p. 59-62. See also New York Times, 9/18/1927. As the railroad tracks occupied the space normally used in skyscrapers for pipes, machinery and equipment storage, the New York Central Building's "basement" was installed on the 15th floor. ("New York Central Building as "Cellar" on 15th Floor," New York Times, February 17, 1929, sec. 12, p. 1).
28. "Workmen Removing a Boom," New York Central Lines, 9 (January 1928) p.22. Appointed as the first American Minister to Japan in 1866, 32-year old Chauncey Depew was persuaded by Cornelius Vanderbilt to refuse the position and to become instead a lawyer for Vanderbilt's railroad interests. Depew became director of the New York Central Railroad in 1874, its president in 1885 and chairman of the board in 1898. Serving simultaneously as United States senator for two terms (1900 - 1902), Depew gave his name to the private street on the east of Grand Central Terminal, stretching from 42nd to 45th Streets. Depew Place was subsequently extended to 46th Street, evidently in conjunction with the construction of the New York Central Building, but later used as a parking lot before being transformed into the current pedestrian mall in 1982. (See Moscow, The Street Book, p. 43; Manhattan land maps (1900 - 1982) and Depew obit., New York Times, April 5, 1928, p. 1).
29. Chase, p. 246.
30. John Tauranac, Essential New York, New York, 1979, p. 159.



31. Goldberger, New York Times, November 30, 1978. sec. C, p. 10.
32. Ibid. See also "Lights Top 230 Park Avenue," New York Times, December 12, 1978, sec. 2, p. 3.

### Alterations

Since its completion in 1929 the lobby and vestibules of the New York Central Building, now the Helmsley Building, have remained substantially intact. Aside from the alterations listed below, the ground floor public spaces, surfaces and fixtures have been well maintained and, following a refurbishing campaign in 1978, largely restored to their original splendor. In the course of the renovations, the lobby's marble and travertine walls were cleaned by poultice, the elevator cabs reconstructed (by National Elevator Cab Company and by Millar Elevator Company), and, somewhat less happily, the bronze chandeliers painted gold. Aside from these changes, the lobby has undergone the following alterations:

- All four original elevator cabs were removed from alcove H (See plan on p. 20). Replacements are not included in this designation.
- 46th Street Vestibule: Modern single-story shopfronts installed in double-height alcoves on either side of the entrance. These metal and glass structures are not subject to this designation but the spaces and surfaces of the alcoves are part of the designated interior.
- 45th Street Vestibule: shopfront altered (located on southeast side of east alcove)

Other, less consequential alterations are listed as appropriate in the description below.

### Description

Located between the east and west vehicular ramps, the narrow double-height lobby of the Helmsley (originally New York Central) Building is almost completely intact. It is flanked on the east and west by four barrel-vaulted elevator banks, and preceded on the north and south by a double-height entrance vestibule with recessed side alcoves. All of the interior spaces are surfaced in cream-colored polished travertine with Jaspe oriental marble wainscoting and trim. The matching travertine pavement is laid in rectilinear and circular patterns set between thin bronze strips. The elevator doors, highly decorated in Chinese red and bronze, are complemented by the red and gilt lobby and vestibule cornices (enriched by secondary color accents). In addition to those features mentioned above, elements of the interior include, but are not limited to:

### 46TH STREET VESTIBULE

- 1 bronze chandelier (painted gold) at center

#### **North Elevation**

- 6 bronze-framed glass doors with bronze surround and ornamented lintel; crowned at center by a rectangular bronze address plate in foliate surround (inscription: "230 PARK//AVE").
- Bronze-framed multi-pane window ensemble divided into 3 large lower lights and 3-part transom by broad structural muntins and mullions; narrow secondary muntins and mullions subdivide each lower light (stationary) into two 4-pane vertical bands on either side of a narrow 4-pane glazed strip. The same basic configuration applied to the transom except each of its 3 lights has 4 panes, the lower two of which are bronze-framed top-hinged windows.
- Simple limestone keystone; descends from elaborate bracketed and foliate cornice

#### **East Elevation**

- Recessed double-height alcove (with modern single-story shopfront installed; See "Alterations" on p. 13); ornamented bronze ventilation grille above the shopfront; same cornice as on north
- Vestibule: ornamented bronze radiator cover (flush with wall plane); simplified cornice

**West Elevation:** Identical to East Elevation

#### **South Elevation**

- Scroll bracket on overhead wall between alcove and vestibule
- Door/window ensemble: identical to that on north elevation, except bronze clock in foliate surround is substituted for the address plate

### LOBBY

- 3 elaborate bronze chandeliers (painted gold)
- continuous bracketed and foliate cornice with frieze of alternating foliate swags

#### **North Elevation**

- Identical to the 46th Street vestibule's south elevation (of which it is the obverse) except:
- Structural mullions and muntins are embossed with foliate pattern
- Lintel has back-lit sign at center ("EAST 46 STREET")
- Same cornice as in rest of lobby

#### **South Elevation**

Identical to North Elevation except lintel reads "EAST 45 STREET"

**East Elevation**

- 2 projecting bronze radiator covers topped by marble slab (located at far north and far south of wall)
- Arched openings to 4 elevator banks (A, D, H & F on plan); each opening framed by boldly projecting marble roll molding with foliate bracket keystone (matching marble)
- Each arch is spanned by an elaborate curvilinear bronze sign support (initials of the New York Central intertwined); suspended from the support, and projecting into the lobby, is a bronze lozenge-shaped back-lit sign indicating floors serviced by elevators
- 2 large bronze-framed tenant directories (affixed to the wall between elevator banks A & D and H & F)
- Large ornamented bronze mailbox on corbeled marble shelf with 2 bronze and glass double-chute mail drops (centrally located between elevator banks D & H); on either side of the mailbox is a small inset utility box with bronze-framed glass cover
- Information booth (located in elevator bank D); faceted paneled wood desk (gilded), topped by marble slab; sign support holds a bronze down-lamp incised on either side ("INFORMATION") instead of elevator indicator

**West Elevation:** Identical to East Elevation except:

- No directories, mailbox or information booth

ELEVATOR BANKS

- Walls, wainscoting and pavement are identical to those in lobby
- Unpolished travertine cornice carved with cornucopia-framed medallions
- Crowning barrel vault has 1 central chandelier (smaller and less elaborate than those in lobby)

**North Elevation**

- 2 elevators with marble frames; highly ornamented bronze doors: Chinese red ground with slightly raised bronze patterns (Renaissance arabesques intertwined with symbols of industry and the initials "NYC")
- 2 elevator indicators: small central light surrounded by bronze ornament (foliage, symbols of industry, progress & commerce) affixed to travertine ground in slightly recessed panels (above elevator doors)
- Elevator cabs: Chinese red walls with inset panels (framed by gilded wood egg-and-dart moldings); gilded foliate cornice; ribbed domed ceiling with impressionistic cloud-scapes painted between ribs

**South Elevation:** Identical to North Elevation**Inner (East/West) Elevation:**

- Double-panel bronze-framed floor indicator with marble frame, set in wainscoting
- Upper travertine lunette (under vault)

All elevators and elevator banks are identical with the following exceptions:

- A:** No sign from sign support; all elevator doors currently obscured by fixed faux-marble panels; all elevators are currently not accessible and are not in operation
- B:** Floor indicator on west wall surmounted by small bronze grille
- D:** Intact, but information desk and modern electronic equipment installed
- F:** Elevators not in service; no sign from sign support; east wall: 2 panels of the floor indicator flank a bronze-framed cover to fire hose box
- H:** Interior cabs of all elevators are new (not included in this designation); modern telecom installed at left of floor indicator (east wall)

#### 45TH STREET VESTIBULE

Identical to 46th Street Vestibule with the following exceptions:

**Alcoves** have lower ceilings and are open (not filled with shopfronts); each has a small bronze chandelier at center; alcoves flanked on east/west walls by bronze radiator screens (flush with wall)

##### **South Elevation**

-Doors are surmounted by individual bronze-framed transom panels; broad bronze panels at bottom of window ensemble; additional glazing band at top of window ensemble (behind bronze grille of 45th St. facade); no foliate bronze address plate above doors.

##### EAST ALCOVE:

**North Elevation:** 1 single-leaf paneled bronze door in slight recess; simple keystone above

**South Elevation:** Modern bronze-framed glass door/window ensemble with simple keystone above; small bronze-framed sign (blank) at right

**East Elevation:** 3 bronze-framed glass doors; bronze grille above; bracket keystone and bronze grille above entrance to alcove

##### WEST ALCOVE

**North Elevation:** Newspaper stand with concealed roll-down security gate installed in recess; paneled bronze counter front; keystone at top of recess

**South Elevation:** Unarticulated wall; Small bronze-framed back-lit sign ("PARK//AVENUE//WEST")

**West Elevation:** Small bronze grille and keystone at entrance to alcove; far wall opens onto marble corridor which descends 3 steps to Helmsley Walk West:

South Wall of Corridor: Pierced by 1 bronze-framed glass door and three windows in original bronze frames

North Wall of Corridor: Pierced by 1 single-leaf paneled bronze door and 2 bronze radiator grilles (flush with wall)



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the New York Central Building, now the Helmsley Building, interior New York Central Building/nor Helmsley Building main floor interior consisting of the 45th Street entrance lobby, 46th Street entrance lobby, main lobby and adjacent side lobbies, and elevator cabs (excluding those in elevator bank H) and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including, but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, chandeliers, information desk, mail boxes, metal grilles, clocks, doors, elevator doors, elevator indicators, signs, and sign supports; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and that the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, and the the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the New York Central Building/nor Helmsley Building Interior survives as an integral part of the planned enclave known as Terminal City; that as part of that enclave it comprises one of the finest legacies of the City Beautiful Movement in New York; that it functions as a through-corridor between 45th and 46th Streets and thereby develops the unique honeycombed character of the New York Central Building/nor Helmsley Building; that as such a corridor it presents an excellent example of axial Beaux-Arts planning; that construction of the lobby in between two vehicular tunnels and over double-layer railroad tracks required extraordinary engineering solutions; that, designed as the lobby of the New York Central Railroad's corporate headquarters, it reflects the railroad's imperial prowess in its lavish appointments; that it was the final design executed for the railroad by Warren & Wetmore, architects of much of Terminal City, and that its well maintained surfaces, fixtures, elevator alcoves and cabs comprise one of the finest Beaux-Arts lobbies in New York.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the New York Central Building, now the Helmsley Building, main floor interior consisting of the 45th Street entrance lobby, 46th Street entrance lobby, main lobby and adjacent side lobbies, and elevator cabs (excluding those in elevator bank H), and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including, but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, chandeliers, information desk, mail boxes, metal grilles, clocks, doors, elevator doors, elevator indicators, signs, and sign supports; 230 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1300, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

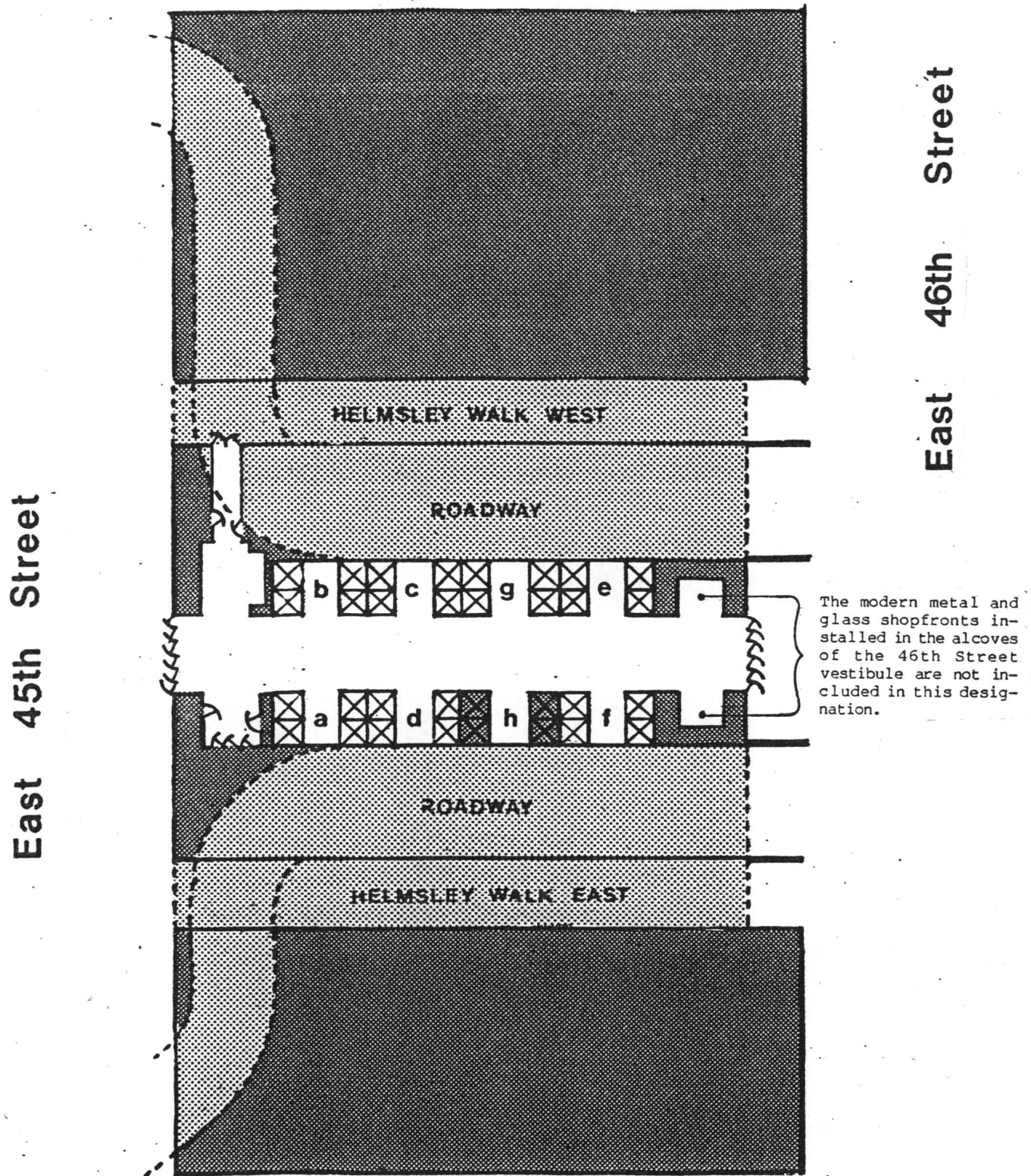
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# MAIN FLOOR INTERIOR

## New York Central Building (Helmsley Building) 230 Park Avenue, Manhattan



**March 31, 1987**

\*Alphabetical assignments to elevator bays follow notations on plan submitted to LPC by Helmsley-Spear, Inc.

-  Interior Designation
-  See Exterior Designation
-  Not Designated

**No Scale**





Lobby, view to the north (to 46th St.)

Photo Credit: Carl Forster

New York Central Building/Helmsley Building  
230 Park Avenue, Manhattan



Detail: Elevator Alcove (b)

Photo Credit: Carl Forster

New York Central Building/Helmsley Building  
230 Park Avenue, Manhattan



Detail: elevator doors

Photo Credit: Carl Forster

New York Central Building/Helmsley Building  
230 Park Avenue, Manhattan





Detail: Original elevator cab interior

Photo Credit: Carl Forster

New York Central Building/Helmsley Building  
230 Park Avenue, Manhattan